

# How I Didn't Write Any of My Books

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*For books, you see, are full to the brim with books! Novels overflow with characters who write novels, essays, treatises, poems... You just have to lean over a little closer.*<sup>1</sup>

—Jacques Jouet

The title of this text, borrowed from two figures in French literature, is both a promise and a confession. It promises firstly to reveal a method, the same one that Roussel set out in his famous but no less enigmatic *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*. The promised revelation of a formula—if indeed there was one—is sure to draw the reader in, but not to offer the writer any useful recipes for success. The main reason for this disappointment is disarming in its simplicity: Raymond Roussel—this much is certain—did write his books. While this fact does indeed support the existence of a supposed method, it also puts you off from using it. Even if followed to the letter, and assimilated to the point that the methods revealed become seen as one's own, thankfully productive, source of inspiration, they are not sufficient to write a book. Raymond Roussel backpedals on the infallibility of a “process” which he himself qualifies as “essentially [...] poetic,” because “[s]till, one needs to know how to use it. For just as one can use rhymes to compose good or bad verses, so one can use this method to produce good or bad works.”<sup>2</sup>

Although Raymond Roussel undoubtedly does honor the promise formulated in his title—he does indeed give us a working writing system based on a certain number of rather Oulipian linguistic tricks—in the subject under discussion here, the mere mention of the title almost simultaneously opposes the statistical reality of the method with its counterweight: of the books whose method of writing I am hoping to make explicit, not one is named. And it's here that the method, the unveiling of which is to the author's great credit, is suddenly tainted with a certain dishonesty, mentioned by Marcel Bénabou in *Why I Have Not Written Any of My Books*, anticipating reservations probably voiced after reading the title:

When [the author] declares that he has not written any of his books, he can have meant, depending on which element of his affirmation is emphasized: that he has had his books written by others, a practice which is not rare and from which one does not emerge debased as one once did; that he has written the books of others, a practice at least as common as the preceding one, albeit clearly less well regarded; that he has contented himself with conceiving of his books without going so far as to commit them to paper; or, finally, that he has written something other than what one normally terms a book.<sup>3</sup>

But where the *why* of Marcel Bénabou removes any taint of fraud from his methods, as it is a kind of admission of inability, the deliberate choice of *how*, dealing not with causes but with the means, raises—not without cause—the suspicion of shameless cheating at one time or another during the enterprise.

When you read the book by Marcel Bénabou, the four interpretations he provides for his title fall one by one. The author did not call upon a ghostwriter, any more than he was one himself; he did not renounce the publication of his manuscripts—though this hypothesis is closest to reality; nor did he choose another form of writing than that offered by a book. He would be a writer without works—and if there were an oeuvre—as we have to admit that this book does exist—it would be entirely devoted to its own achievement, or approaching its vicinity. And Marcel Bénabou would join the ranks of abstinent authors, having created a nonproductive, nonrealized, and nonrealizing art.

Talking about his own oeuvre, Cervantes said that one should also admire him for what he had not written. This statement contains in itself the whole idea of a counter-literature, a blank or hollow literature, stolen from our hands and our sight for the simple reason that it was never written. Faced with the thousands of volumes lined up to infinity on the library shelves, a work is also everything that was not, or could not be written down on paper: its failures, its hesitations, its regrets, its projects, its fantasies, its ideal even, filling far more than pages, but entire lives. There are books, then, that we must be content with imagining: *Le Traité du dandysme* (On Dandyism) promised by Charles Baudelaire, the six *Célestes* (Luminaries), corresponding to the six *Diaaboliques* (The She-Devils) by Barbey d'Aurevilly, or again the novel *Vita Nova* by Roland Barthes of which we know only the first eight pages; and there are authors with the special status as writers of unwritten books: Jacques Rigaut, a member of the Dada movement whose *Papiers posthumes* (Posthumous Papers), for better or worse, form a volume, remained paralyzed when faced with the creative act. The same fate awaited Jacques Vaché's oeuvre—that is, his correspondence with figures like André Breton—which contained in its few lines, the foundations of Surrealism. As for Joseph Joubert, he left a few articles, some letters, and a total devotion to literature. He dreamed his entire life of his book, which he prepared and began ceaselessly, pouring into his copious notes an ideal he could only long for. He only encountered literature on its peripheries, first as the reader of others, as he was a great admirer of Denis Diderot and Restif de la Bretonne, as well as being a habitué of writers' circles, then as the reader of his own unattainable works, which he always seemed to hold at arm's length.

Except you must actually begin, as Henry James tried to convince himself: “[B]egin it – begin it! Don’t talk *about* it only, and around it.”<sup>4</sup> But all through his book, Marcel Bénabou never finishes beginning, to the point where—an irony of sorts—a book appears. So, the reason why he never wrote any of his books, at least as he could have imagined them, has nothing to do with pseudonyms, or with plagiarism, but with the vertigo caused by all the books already written and the premonition of those to come in the flux of an “ever ongoing production.”<sup>5</sup> The paralysis is partly due to quantity: “Perhaps you are among those who, like me, can no longer go to a bookstore without feeling a twinge of sorrow, but who don’t leave without feeling a certain uneasiness either, indeed a sort of virtual nausea: so many books.”<sup>6</sup> And, partly due to quality, in that we all could have been the objects of our own jealousy if only we could have been bothered: “Will I dare bring up in passing the feeling of frustration that certain books left in me? Not because they disappointed me; quite the contrary. But I couldn’t keep myself from thinking as I read that once again I had missed an opportunity. It had, of course, been my place to write this book I had just finished reading,” to end on, “more convinced than ever of the absolute uselessness of my efforts.”<sup>7</sup>

Yet this labyrinth of books, where Marcel Bénabou situates the roots of his silence, where the talented get discouraged and the mediocre give up, is my opportunity. Because the books which I have not written may well be found there.

From one labyrinth, another.<sup>8</sup>

Bénabou’s vertigo is as nothing compared to the limitless library envisaged by Jacques Jouet,<sup>9</sup> the potential library that would unofficially constitute the different kinds of imaginary books set within real books. More than the old game of story-within-a-story, this would involve books imagined at the very heart of a fiction, functioning as a motif. The author could indeed, at some point in his story, have need of a book. For this, he has two choices: the first is to use a real book, written by an actual author, published, and therefore palpable. The reading list of *Madame Bovary* is of this type, as are those of Proust’s narrator, or the books in the library of Alfred Jarry’s Dr. Faustroll. In this way, the *Paul and Virginia* read by Emma, the *François le Champi* discovered at the Guermantes, or *The Songs of Maldoror* on the shelves of Dr. Faustroll’s library are, without a doubt, identical to those that we have read, or could read. Therefore, in the same way that an author can develop his or her characters in real places, which the reader can then physically visit, actual titles can occur in a story because a character came across them, obtained them, read them, or wrote them. Actually, to choose one’s reading according to the hero of a story would be a lovely project.

The second choice would be to invent a book, giving it at least a title, or in the vast majority of cases, a title and an author, whether they are both imaginary or made-up in

tandem with a real title or real author, where the hybrid would constitute a third way of creating the book-within-the-book. For example, Jean d’Ormesson in *The Glory of the Empire* attributes books he has made up himself to real authors: *The Life of Alexis* to Ernest Renan and *The Death of Bruince* to Georg Büchner,<sup>10</sup> while Jean Paul makes his character Maria Wutz write, in his way, works which he could not personally obtain, such as the *Treatise on Space and Time* or the *Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>11</sup> In a similar way, certain characters invented by Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares manage to *rewrite* actual earlier works through the process of “deliberate anachronism”<sup>12</sup> or by annexation. Such is the case of the celebrated Pierre Ménard, who has a sizeable bibliography in Borges’s short story in which one finds a section of *Don Quixote*, or the case of César Paladion, “annex[ing] a complete opus”<sup>13</sup> like *The Hound of the Baskervilles* or *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

Alongside these conjuring tricks that require reading short stories, precisely because in them Borges reveals the ways in which his characters can pull off such feats, is the dizzying catalog of imaginary books attributed to fictitious authors. In no particular order: *The Bee* by Stanisla Beren; *Right of Passage* by Hugh Verecker; *Olympi glossarium* by Louis Toljan; *Roof Gardening* by Roger-Marin Courtial des Peireires; *Examination of Christianity* by Louis Hervieu; *Maya* by Gustav Aschenbach; *Petites introductions* by Lucien Lormier or *Mad Tryst* by Launcelot Canning,<sup>14</sup> without ever being able to give a definitive list because as soon as we start making it, the tragicomic possibility appears that fictitious books are infinitely more numerous than real ones.

For someone who begins to look for these books, one can be found every day, to the point of orienting your reading around them, and nourishing it mainly from this quest. To the extent, also, of discovering an unexplored potential, enticing with each new title discovered, but invariably dropped when merely named. For in the vast majority of cases, the reality of the imaginary book goes no further than the mention of its title and the author’s name, falling away like a stage set of which only the visible facade has been built. But for the person who looks a little closer, the “monument” can “complete” itself,<sup>15</sup> and the inclusion of an imaginary book inside a real book becomes truly interesting where the author builds clues and verisimilitudes around it that, more than just adding to a fiction, can actually give it form.

There are many approaches. It can begin in the universe of the bibliographical catalog, and the means at its disposal. To a simple alphabetical list made up of the names of authors and titles, a date, a place, and a publisher can be added. To quote among many other examples: Skip Canell, *Pessimism*, New York, Indolence Books Ltd., 1948; Amadeu Inácio De Almeida Prado, *Um ourives das palavrassas*, Lisbon, Cedros Vermelhos, 1975; Benjamin Jordane,

*Fumées sans feux*, Paris, Capitaine éd., 1971; Carlo Olgiati, *Le métabolisme historique*, Novare, La Redentina, 1931; or such as Vadim Vadimovitch, *Podarok Otchiznié*, New York, Turgenev Publishing House, 1950,<sup>16</sup> which confer the legitimacy of a scientific reference on a work, and almost incline us to go into the libraries, adding the translators: Robert Nolke, "The stimulating interlocutor," in *Lost and Recovered Prose*, translation by Marc Montmirail, Maillot, 1971; or printers: Carlos Anglada, *The Copybooks of the Diver*, printed by Le Minotaure, éd. Probeta, 1939; and illustrators: Argentino Schiaffino, *Solitude*, prologue by Morazán, illustrations by Berta Macchio Morazán, Buenos Aires, 1987.<sup>17</sup> If the hypothetical Pierre Marteau has published an excessive number of all too real books, some authors co-opt actual publishers for the edition of works imagined for their characters. Thus, in *Aurélien* by Aragon, the books by Paul Denis are published by Sans-Pareil for *Défense d'entrée* and by Editions Kra for *Les promenades noires*. Even better, Enrique Vila-Matas in the fanciful bibliography concluding his *A Brief History of Portable Literature*, bets on the future release of an unpublished work by Francis Picabia called *Widows and Soldiers* (*Veuves et Militaires*) of which he proclaims the "imminent release at the José Corti bookstore."<sup>18</sup>

To the simple mention of bibliographies, one might add the material conditions as noted in sales catalogs. Such include the famous *Catalog of Count de Fortsas' Library* (*Catalogue de la bibliothèque de M. le comte de Fortsas*),<sup>19</sup> of which Renier Chalon was one of the main instigators, which informs us for each title of the format, the number of pages, even the binding: "12mo 2 part. of 115 & 210 p., illus., bdg. orig. Red Morocco" for the *The Memoirs of Abbot D. M. R. D. F. A. L.* (*Mémoires de l'abbé D. M. R. D. F. A. L.*), or "4to of 695 p., illus., bdg. blue velvet, with corners and clasp of silver" for *Promptuarium antiquitatum Trevirensium*. The descriptions can go as far as detailing eventual "wormholes in the lower margin" or the "inkblot on p. 21." We can even go beyond the dedicated, and of necessity abbreviated, language of the catalogs to find the fully-fledged descriptions that some authors give their works. In *53 Days*, Georges Perec precisely describes the manuscript of Robert Serval:

It takes the form of a manuscript of 130 neatly typed pages, free of corrections, deletions or additions of any kind. There is a quite peculiar black and white photograph gummed on the front cover, which is just a sheet of shiny black plastic without the name of the book, or of the author. I presume that what it represents is a painted signboard, bearing a rather primitive but charming sign, that must be posted somewhere in the southern depths of Morocco. It depicts a semi-arid landscape, with a few traces of vegetation and a clump of trees in the far distance, against a background of sand dunes and hills. In the left foreground is a smiling native face, cut off at the bust by the picture frame; the native holds the reins of

a camel entering from the left, with only the neck and head of the beast visible in profile. In the middle ground, four camel-drivers ride their mounts towards the right. Against the sky, a long arrow points rightwards beneath the legend stencilled in large letters: TIMBUKTOO 52 DAYS and above that, a legend in Arabic which presumably says the same thing, the other way round.<sup>20</sup>

This gives a very precise image of the work, of which we can easily visualize the cover, more so in that Perec had envisaged using the photograph described here as the cover of his book, and that the Editions P.O.L. actually includes a reproduction on page 7.

Going one step further, Vadim Vadimovitch, the writer-hero of Nabokov in *Look at the Harlequins!* goes so far as to discover "a copy of a Formosan paperback reproduced from the American edition" of his novel *A Kingdom by the Sea*. After having described this copy, he tells us about the back cover, in which he is upset by the inevitable misprints:

Bertram, an unbalanced youth, doomed to die shortly in an asylum for the criminal insane, sells for ten dollars his ten-year-old sister Ginny to the middle-aged bachelor Al Garden, a wealthy poet who travels with the beautiful child from resort to resort through America and other countries. A state of affairs that looks at first blush—and "blush" is the right word—like a case of irresponsible perversion (described in brilliant detail never attempted before) develops by the grees [misprint] into a genuine dialogue of tender love. Garden's feelings are reciprocated by Ginny, the initial "victim" who at eighteen, a normal nymph, marries him in a warmly described religious ceremony. All seems to end honky-donky [sic!] in everlasting bliss of a sort fit to meet the sexual demands of the most rigid, or frigid, humanitarian, had there not been running its chaotic course, in a sheef [sheaf?] of parallel lives beyond our happy couple's ken, the tragic tiny [destiny?] of Virginia Garden's inconsolable parents, Oliver and [?], whom the clever author by every means in his power, prevents from tracking their daughter Dawn [sic!!]. A Book-of-the-Decade choice.<sup>21</sup>

The profusion of details turns bitter when we realize that our reading has to stop here. For those who decide to hunt down imaginary books inside real books, reading the back cover, the final touch to a book that was finished and published, can be cruel. There remains that intolerable feeling of receiving something only to have it taken back. That's the fate of many imaginary books: they use an indirect mode via a more or less detailed synopsis revealing the plot rather than the entire text once given anything beyond a title, author's name, or bibliographical reference and description of the volume's condition. So, for *The Crypt*, it's the narrator of *53 Days*, hired to investigate the disappearance of the writer Robert Serval, who devotes almost thirty pages

to a detailed report of his reading, presenting the setting, the characters, and the facts, with which he mingles his observations as a reader/investigator.<sup>22</sup>

In Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*, one approaches the content through the commentaries of the hero Antoine Roquentin, which he gives us as he copies out his work on the Marquis of Rollebon: "Tuesday, 30 January: I worked from nine till one in the library. I got Chapter XII started and all that concerns Rollebon's stay in Russia up to the death of Paul I. This work is finished: nothing more to do with it until the final revision." Or "7.00 p.m. Work Today. It didn't go too badly; I wrote six pages with a certain amount of pleasure. The more so since it was a question of abstract considerations on the reign of Paul I."<sup>23</sup>

The peculiar example of *Les noces* (The Wedding) by Jean Giono is quite remarkable. Here is a novel, or so it seems at first glance, literally set inside another. Indeed, Giono closes *Noé* (Noah), which is presented as a sequel to *A King without Diversion* with the announcement of the following book in the series, entitled *Les noces*, the plot of which he goes on to explain over about twenty pages.<sup>24</sup> The reader thus enters into the confidence of a story as it unfolds, while Giono sketches little by little the settings and characters at a country wedding which he seems to be discovering along with us, and as the creator, building at the same time: "Let's not get carried away [...] gently, now" (p. 845); "Stop! I have something to say about the costumes. [...] What do we imagine? After all I've said, do we imagine the peasant wedding according to the texts?" (p. 847); "First of all, the landscape I just described, I see it at dawn. It's the morning of the day which will be the day of *The Wedding*. I'll start at that exact time" (p. 855); and concerning the character of the father: "Like every morning, he went outside and pissed. I make him piss, like a horse, with thick, foamy urine" (p. 855); or the old woman: "She approached the father (I'll have to give him a name). She says... No, what she says is already the book. It's already *The Wedding*" (p. 856). This last phrase is telling. The moment he is about to make the old woman speak, Giono changes his mind, because whatever she could say "is already the book. It's already *The Wedding*," and for the time being, he only talks about the general project. This won't go much further, unfortunately, and we will have to be content with reported speech, according to Giono's words, in parentheses.<sup>25</sup>

Because the true text is precisely what constitutes the work I have been searching for: not the words actually reported or retold, but all the words the author might have made the old woman say, and the entire *Wedding* built around them; it would also include the completed book by Antoine Roquentin, as well as *The Crypt*, liberated by another person's reading. These works are lost for the simple reason that they are incomplete. These books that I have not written will have to remain so. It does not mean, through the pretext of a synopsis or an author's note of intention, devel-

oping a text whose precise form can never be known. Nor is it exactly writing in the style of another author, of mimicking the tics of their language, or of hijacking their turns of phrase. Neither is it to extend an unfinished work, or to put forward variations. It means finding, according to the growing degrees of existence of the imaginary book, from vague allusion to quotes, passing via the detailed outline, the cases of autonomous books which contain enough information to be *written* and therefore published in an independent volume. Such books have not only a title and an author, but the entirety of their content is available, quoted at length in the body of the text, requiring just a simple copying, or involving certain literary fictions invented by a real author. This is where the possibility of editorial work to dig out these books from within other books begins, and whose reality, up to now subordinated, only depends on being put down on the page. The publisher which brings these together is called Lorem Ipsum. It takes its name from the dummy text used by printers, randomly generated as placeholder for a missing text, to aid layout and calibration of the proofs. In the same way, the publications of Lorem Ipsum are potential books which already exist, captured with all the ease of cut-and-paste. The difficulty lies in unearthing these rare cases.

When such a book does appear, it is a small miracle. Having been blindly sought after and devoutly hoped for, the complete reading is often disappointed at the last minute. The vast majority of books that I thought I had found in their entirety evaporated with the whim of story. The main reason for these failures can be explained by the fact that the restoration of the fictive work remains subordinate to the story which hosts it, the main tale. Thus in *Lost Illusions*, Balzac only completely quotes four sonnets from the collection by Lucien Chardon entitled *The Marguerites*, precisely because the latter offers "sample sonnets" for examination by the journalist Etienne Lousteau. Thereafter, following "*Easter Daisies*," the poet reads a second sonnet in the hope of getting some reaction from the impassive listener, then the next two after his request, "Go on," and "Read us one more sonnet." The reading of the fourth sonnet, however, is followed by "a pause, immeasurably long, as it seemed to him," which brings to an end the lecture, and by the same count, my writing.<sup>26</sup>

In the same way, the novel that Peter Morgan writes in *The Vice-Consul* by Marguerite Duras is only quoted as it is being written, clearly marked in the text by such opening formulae as "wrote Peter Morgan," or closing remarks such as "Peter Morgan has stopped writing."<sup>27</sup> Between the two, the novel, though free-standing, remains incomplete.

In *The Thibaults* by Roger Martin du Gard, *La sorellina* by Jack Baulthy (aka Jacques Thibault) is for its part subordinated to the reading rhythm of Antoine Thibault who leafs furiously through the brochure hoping to find clues to the disappearance of his brother. The short story, set apart

from the main plot by the use of italics, is thus cut up by interruptions from Antoine who, in his hurried reading, gets impatient with descriptive passages and “jumped from one paragraph to another” or “skipped some pages, sampling a passage here and there.”<sup>28</sup>

As for the nine stories begun in *If On A Winter's Night, A Traveler...* by Italo Calvino, unexpected events (duplicated signatures, printing errors, unfinished works, wrongly inserted texts, swapped out translations, etc.) continually interrupt our reading, making the book a succession of run-ups and false beginnings which we can make neither head nor tail of.<sup>29</sup>

Because the work I am searching for has to be complete, and few fictional works manage that, only a close reading of the book which contains them can justify, or not, their selection. What I call in a cavalier fashion “my books,” not as their author, but as their publisher, I necessarily cannot have written because I have read them. The kind of writing in question here, which confers all its imposture on “the method,” is in fact reading. It means precisely writing by reading, as we used to say of Matisse that he painted with scissors. Missing out the earlier stage of the pencil sketch, Matisse decided to cut directly into the color, at the same time creating its form. Here reading can be, depending on how advanced it is, an all-encompassing synchronous activity of sampling and writing. In order to carry this out, my “scissors” might, during the reading, stumble across an obstacle which, as soon as it crops up, however insignificant it seems, could definitively ruin the project of publication of the fictitious book. A single sentence missed by a character reading, or overlooked by the character writing, for the manifold reasons inherent in the main story, can be enough to lose the thread of a complete text, as the first book will always take precedence over the second book. For it to appear demands the stepping back of the first book, which then becomes a disposable peritext which the author may not mark as clearly as Giono does in *Noë*: “Noah ends here. *The Wedding* begins here...,”<sup>30</sup> or as clearly as Cervantes in *Don Quixote* alerting his readers to the insertion of a short story external to the main book: “One of the faults they find with this history, [...] is that its author inserted in it a novel called *An Impertinent Curiosity*; not that it is bad or ill-told, but that it is out of place and has nothing to do with the history of his worship Señor Don Quixote.”<sup>31</sup> In this particular case, one can simply drop the before and after. In more complex examples, one has to tease out the peritext from the body of the fictional work like so many stage directions, and extract an autonomous text. In the ultimate recourse, one has to activate a fiction. For instance, Borges opposes “the visible works” of Pierre Menard, detailed in

an exhaustive bibliography which he supplies at the beginning of his short story, from his “subterranean” works composed of “the ninth and thirty-eighth chapters of Part One of *Don Quixote* and a fragment of the twenty-second chapter.”<sup>32</sup> And yet, even though these texts are “verbally identical,”<sup>33</sup> their meanings are different, the tour de force lying in being able to obtain precisely the same text in the context of contemporary writing. The *Quixote* of Menard cannot therefore be read without dissociating it from Cervantes, and without its reification in the story by Borges, at the heart of which it remains the captive of its own myth. The entire works of the latter are in fact marked out with equivalent fictions, from César Paladion to Lamkin Formento, passing by Federico Juan Carlos Loomis. The volumes that are attributed to them do not embody productions of the mind but certain procedures of the mind championed by Borges. The “amplification of units,” a writing technique whereby Paladion writes twelve books; the descriptivist critique which leads Formento to apply an analysis to *The Divine Comedy* which is identical to Dante’s original text, after the suppression of the peritext; and the pursuit of a quintessence of literature which brings Loomis to an exact correspondence of a work with its own title;<sup>34</sup> all these are so many strategies of creation which justify the concretization of those works. Their culmination is in the separate volume; better still, to loosen them from their original context is to give them the possibility, postponed until that point, of being read.

So, to the question of “How I didn’t write any of my books,” I can simply reply—using the words of Jacques Jouet—that I have leaned over a little closer and gathered the books together—which is indeed what happened. Moreover, Lorem Ipsum is still the owner of a strange work of which I have not encountered any of the authors, whether they were, or were not, of flesh and bone. Furthermore, to whom do these books belong? To their authors? To their characters? To their publishers? Which is a role, in this particular case, that consists of picking them out, and giving them form, and which makes us wonder about publishing as an act of creation.

Speaking of *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, Michel Foucault wrote, “Because to copy is to do nothing; it is to be the books being copied.”<sup>35</sup> It is precisely between the execution (*doing*) and the incarnation (*being*) that the project of Lorem Ipsum acts, the poetic gesture of an act of publishing which breathes life as it appropriates and, whereby, each borrowing can improve itself, in turn.

“To read means to borrow; to create out of one’s readings is paying off one’s debts.”<sup>36</sup>

- 1 Jacques Jouet, cited by Paul Braffort, "Les Bibliothèques invisibles," in *La Bibliothèque oulipienne*, vol. 3 (Paris: Seghers, 1990), 246. Unless otherwise indicated all translations by Russell Richardson.
- 2 Raymond Roussel, *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, trans. Trevor Winkfield (Boston: Exact Change, 1995), 16; originally published as *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* (Paris: Pauvert, 1985), 23.
- 3 Marcel Bénabou, *Why I Have Not Written Any of My Books*, trans. David Kornacker (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 14; originally published as *Pourquoi je n'ai écrit aucun de mes livres* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), 18–19.
- 4 F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, eds., *The Notebooks of Henry James* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 110.
- 5 Bénabou, *Why I Have Not Written Any of My Books*, 8; *Pourquoi je n'ai écrit aucun de mes livres*, 12.
- 6 Bénabou, 51–52; Bénabou, 43.
- 7 Bénabou, 56, 57; Bénabou, 48.
- 8 [A subtle nod of the head to Louis-Ferdinand Céline's *D'un château l'autre*, perhaps translatable as *From one Castle, Another rather than Castle to Castle*. Trans.]
- 9 See the epitaph to this text.
- 10 Jean d'Ormesson, *The Glory of the Empire*, trans. Barbara Blay (London: Book Club Associates, 1975); originally published as *La Gloire de l'Empire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).
- 11 Jean Paul, "Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Maria Wutz in Auenthal. Eine Art Idylle" (Life of the Cheerful Schoolmaster Maria Wutz), in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1-1 (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1960), 422–62.
- 12 Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote," in *Ficciones*, trans. Anthony Bonner et al. (New York: Grove Press / Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994), 54; originally published as "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote" in *Obras Completas*, vol. 1: 1923–1949 (Mallorca, Barcelona: Emecé Editores, 1996), 450.
- 13 Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares, "Homage to Cesar Paladion," in *Chronicles of Bustos Domecq*, trans. Norman Thomas Di Giovanni (New York: Dutton, 1979), 22; originally published as "Homenaje a César Paladión," in *Crónicas de Bustos Domecq* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, S.A., 1968), 19.
- 14 Respectively cited in the following works: Michel Déon, *Un déjeuner de soleil* (Where Are You Dying Tonight?); Henry James, *The Figure in the Carpet*; Raymond Roussel, *Locus Solus*; Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Mort à crédit* (Death on Credit); Gustave Flaubert, *Bouvard and Pécuchet*; Thomas Mann, *Tod in Venedig* (Death in Venice); Marcel Aymé, *Les tiroirs de l'inconnu* (The Drawers of the Unknown Man); Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher*.
- 15 [See Flaubert's *Bouvard and Pécuchet*: "The page must fill itself, the 'monument' completes itself ..." Trans.]
- 16 Respectively cited in the following works: Enrique Vila-Matas, *A Brief History of Portable Literature*, trans. Thomas Bunstead and Anne McLean (New York: New Directions, 2015); originally published as *Historia abreviada de la literatura portátil* (Barcelona: Ed. Anagrama, 2002); Pascal Mercier, *Night Train to Lisbon*, trans. Barbara Harshav (New York: Grove Press, 2008); originally published as *Nachtzug nach Lissabon* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2004); Jean-Benoît Puech, *L'apprentissage du roman* (Seyssel: Champ Vaillon, 1993); J. Rodolfo Wilcock, *The Temple of Iconoclasts*, trans. Lawrence Venuti (San Francisco: Mercury House, 2000); originally published as *La sinagoga degli iconoclasti* (Milano: Adelphi, 1972); Vladimir Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974).
- 17 Puech, *L'apprentissage du roman*; Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares, *Six Problems for Don Isidro Parodi*, trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1981); originally published as *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi* (Buenos Aires: Sur, 1942); Roberto Bolaño, *Nazi Literature in the Americas*, trans. Chris Andrews (New York: New Directions, 2008); originally published as *La literatura nazi en América* (Barcelona: Seix Barral 2005).
- 18 Vila-Matas, *A Brief History* (*Historia abreviada*).
- 19 The entirety of the *Catalogue d'une très riche mais peu nombreuse collection de livres provenant de la bibliothèque de feu M. le comte J.-N.-A. de Fortsas dont la vente se fera à Binche, le 10 août 1840, à onze heures du matin, en l'étude et par le ministère de Me Mourlon, Notaire, rue de l'Eglise, n°9*—was published in facsimile in 2005 by Éditions des Cendres.
- 20 Georges Perec, *53 Days*, trans. David Bellos (Jaffrey: David R. Godine, 2000), 22–23; originally published as *53 jours* (Paris: P.O.L., 1989), 41–42.
- 21 Vladimir Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!*, 215–16 [square brackets in original].
- 22 Georges Perec, *53 Days*, 23–48; 53 jours, 42–68.
- 23 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions, 1964), 6, 57; originally published as *La Nausée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), 18, 86.
- 24 Jean Giono, *Noé, in Oeuvres romanesques complètes*, vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 844–62.
- 25 "[E]verything I have to say about this Wedding, I have to say in parentheses. This seems to mean that there are some enormous parentheses which, at the end, will fill up with everything I have to say on the subject." Giono, *Noé*, 847.
- 26 Honoré de Balzac, *Lost Illusions: A Distinguished Provincial at Paris and other stories*, trans. Ellen Marriage (Philadelphia: Gebbie Publishing 1899), 99–103: "Easter Daisies," "The Marguerite," "The Camellia," "The Tulip"; originally published as *Illusions perdues*, in *La Comédie humaine*, vol. 5 (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), 336–41; "La Pâquerette," "La Marguerite," "La Camélia," "La Tulipe."
- 27 Marguerite Duras, *The Vice-Consul* (London: Hamilton, 1968), 1, 18; originally published as *Le Vice-Consul* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 1, 18.
- 28 Roger Martin du Gard, *The Thibaults*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Viking Press, 1939), 641–43; originally published as *La Sorellina*, in *Les Thibault*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 41–43.
- 29 Italo Calvino, *If On A Winter's Night, A Traveler...*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), comprising: "Outside the Town of Malbork" by Taddio Bazakbal; "Leaning From the Steep Slope" by Ukko Ahti; "Without Fear of Wind or Vertigo" by Vorts Viljandi; "Looks Down in the Gathering Shadow" by Bertrand Vandervelde; "In a Network of Lines That Enlace" by Hermès Manara; "In a Network of Lines That Intersect" by Silas Flannery; "On the Carpet of Leaves Illuminated by the Moon" by Takakumi Ikoka; "Around an Empty Grave" by Calixto Bandera; and "What Story Down There Awaits Its End?" by Anatoly Anatoline; originally published as *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* (Torino: Einaudi, 1979).
- 30 Giono, *Noé*, 862.
- 31 Miguel de Cervantes, *The Ingenious Nobleman Don Quixote de la Mancha*, trans. Tobias Smollet (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2004), vol. 2, ch. 3, 459; originally published as *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de La Mancha* (Madrid: Ed. Castalia, 1983), vol. 2, chap. 3.
- 32 Borges, "Pierre Menard," 45–48; "Pierre Ménard," 444–46.
- 33 Borges, 52; Borges, 449.
- 34 Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares, "Homage to Cesar Paladion," "Naturalism revived," "A List and Analysis of the Sundry Books of F. J. C. Loomis," in *Chronicles*, 22, 41–48, and 49–56; originally published as "Homenaje a César Paladión," "Naturalismo al día," "Catálogo y análisis de los diversos libros de Loomis," in *Crónicas*, 15–20, 37–43, and 45–51.
- 35 Michel Foucault, "The Fantasia of the Library," in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interview*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 109; originally published as "La Bibliothèque fantastique," in *Gustave Flaubert, La Tentation de saint Antoine* (Paris: LGF, 1971), 32.
- 36 Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *Letters and Aphorisms*, trans. H. C. Harfield and F. H. Mautner (London: Cape, 1969), 40; originally published as *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1: *Sudelbücher* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1968), 46.

